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DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

Memorandum for Public and Separate School Inspectors Regarding the Course of Study

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The Minister requests that Inspectors advise their teachers to familiarize themselves thoroughly with the course of study for Public and Separate Schools as a condition of its successful presentation to their pupils. This circular is issued to Inspectors to draw their attention to some of the main features of the course, in order that they may impress these upon the teachers at the earliest opportunity.

The lightening of the course affords more time than has hitherto been available to devote to the fundamentals of education. Though there may be slight differences of opinion as to what subjects constitute the fundamentals, there will doubtless be general agreement that reading, writing, language, and practical arithmetic should be included.

A valuable part of the child's education in the elementary schools must always be the cultivation of his power to read with ease and intelligence. It is upon this power that most of his subsequent progress will necessarily depend. It is, therefore, of the utmost importance that reading should be stressed in all the grades. The course of study provides for much practice in reading not only from the school Readers but also from a variety of supplementary reading books. Provision for supplementary reading should be made for all classes from the Primer upwards, and it is expected that the school library will be made a more potent factor than before in the child's education.

The new course lays strong emphasis upon language training. It is generally recognized that one of the most important phases of a child's elementary education, from the practical standpoint, is an adequate training in the use of language both oral and written. Language is the medium by which the child makes known his needs, communicates his

ideas, and impresses his opinions upon others. His influence in the world will depend largely upon his power to use language effectively. In the past, the school has not fully seized its opportunity in the development of language power. The greatest care should be taken to ensure that every pupil has sufficient practice in the use of language under competent, sympathetic, and stimulating criticism. The course in Composition has been designed with a view to providing ample and suitable material for both oral and written exercises, but it should be emphaized that, in all the school subjects, the pupil should be trained to express himself clearly, fluently, and coherently.

The course in Arithmetic is concerned mainly with those number operations that have a direct relation to practical life. The formalism and the drudgery that have too often characterized this subject in the elementary school should be discarded. As the abstract relations involved in Arithmetic are difficult for the young child to grasp, the early work should be largely of an informal character, and closely associated with his daily activities. Stress should be laid upon oral work at all stages. In the senior classes, pupils should be given practice in working rapidly and accurately, mainly such problems and exercises as are found to have a practical value. Complicated problems involving calculations that are seldom required in actual life should be strictly avoided. The laboured grind upon long mechanical exercises in the elementary rules, compound rules, complex and decimal fractions should be discountinued.

The courses in History have been considerably reduced. The History in Forms I and II is correlated with Composition and is not to be taken up as a separate subject. In Form III the course is based on "The Story of the British People," known as the Form III History Reader. Teachers should make careful study of the possibility of this book in laying the basis of a lively interest in historical reading. It is expected that the children in this Form will be led to read with appreciation the interesting stories in this book as a preparation for the more formal study of History in the next Form. In Form IV the course is based on the authorized text-books in British and Canadian History. It will be noted that a part of each book is prescribed for study in the Junior grade and another part of each in the Senior grade.

With regard to the other subjects, Inspectors should direct the attention of the teachers to the introductory notes at the beginning of the prescription for each course, as these

give valuable direction regarding the purposes to be attained and methods to be followed. In the subjects where minimum and supplementary courses are prescribed, it is believed that the minimum courses are of such a nature as to be readily covered in any school, and it is hoped that, where conditions will permit, some of the work detailed in the supplementary courses will also be taken.

In general the High School Entrance examination will be based on the prescription of work for Form IV. But in the subjects of Arithmetic, History, and Geography, in which the Form IV courses are divided into Junior and Senior grades, the written examination will be based on the course prescribed for the Senior grade only. In Arithmetic, however, accuracy in the simple rules and in calculations involving measurements, fractions, and decimals will be tested in connection with practical problems drawn from the common activities of life.

The Minister urges the Inspectors to discourage, even more than they have done in the past, unreasonable requirements in the matter of homework for pupils in the elementary schools. These children are at a period when vital energies are largely consumed in physical development, and consequently they must have time for rest and recreation. The school has no excuse for infringing upon the right of the children to sufficient time for sleep and play, and the right of the home to direct their activities outside of school hours. There can be no doubt that both of these rights are seriously encroached upon by the prescription of homework, ill-chosen in character and excessive in quantity. For pupils below Form III, there is ample time during the school day to cover the prescribed courses satisfactorily without burdening them with additional school work to be done at home. For pupils in the higher Forms, a moderate amount of homework may reasonably be required, but it should consist mainly of supplementary reading, memory work and review of work taught in school. The widespread practice of assigning for homework problems in arithmetic, analysis and parsing in grammer, map-drawing in geography, and written exercises in composition should be discontinued. The school day is sufficiently long for all necessary work of this kind.

Supervised work in the class-room may well be substituted for many of the exercises that pupils are at present required to do at home. In order that the pupils may have adequate opportunity for seat-work, including independent study, the revised Regulations require that the teacher's time-table shall be so arranged that each child may have at least

one and a half hours each day for this purpose. One of the charges frequently brought against the elementary school is that the pupil is not trained to study independently or to work out things for himself. The ungraded rural school, and the school with at least two grades in a class-room should not be open to this charge, for in such schools, because of the nature of the organization, opportunity must be given to classes to study by themselves. If such study periods are properly directed, there should be no question of the pupil's developing habits of independent study. It is in the case of graded schools in which there is only one class in a room that difficulty in this connection is likely to occur. Here the teacher often considers it his duty to teach his class continuously throughout the school day. Such a practice gives little opportunity to develop initiative, independence, or self-reliance. This deficiency may be removed either by organizing the school in such a way that each class-room will have two different grades—a plan that is favoured by many Inspectors—or by dividing the class into two sections for certain of the school subjects. While one section is being taught, the other section may be engaged in seat exercises or study. There can be no doubt that the judicious alternation of teaching lessons and study lessons will result not only in more rapid progress in learning but also in the development of proper habits of study. The provision of the one and a half hours made by the Regulations, during which the pupil is freed from formal instruction, will undoubtedly do much to bring about these desirable ends, and will, moreover, make unnecessary much of the homework heretofore assigned.

It has long been recognized that the teacher's lasting influence upon the life and the character of children is made, not merely through the lessons taught in the school, the facts of which may be largely forgotten, but mainly through the intensity of his enthusiasm, the keenness of his interests and the force of his ideals. All teachers do not possess that strong personality which leaves its indelible impress upon the child, but many have potentialities which merely need development. One of the most important duties of the Inspector should therefore be to seek out this type of teacher, and to encourage and develop those qualities which will leave their permanent impression upon the character of the children in the schools to-day, and eventually upon the type of citizenship which this Province is to have in the years to come.

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION,

Toronto, April, 1937.